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EGOS2012 – Sub-theme 09:

(SWG) Artifacts in Art, Design, and Organization

Jonathan Vickery: University of Warwick

email: J.P.Vickery@warwick.ac.uk

Ian W. King: University of the Arts, London

email: i.king@fashion.arts.ac.uk

De-familiarizing the organization: fashion and clothing in the global city

Introduction

Our first concept is 'defamiliarization', our second 'fashion', and our third 'global city'. Defamiliarization relates to both our theory and method (where the relation between the two become critical, and hopefully dynamic); fashion is our object of analysis; and 'global city' relates to the processes of economic urbanism that mediates so much of organizational life.

We hold that the urban 'culturescape' of the city is all too often ignored in research on the development and dynamic of organizations. An organization's 'location', for us therefore, is not simply 'context' or 'background', or a topic for the urban sociologist. While we do not focus on the urban culturescape of the organization, we conclude with some points underlining its importance, and throughout indicate that its situation within a given urban metropolis is intrinsic to an organization's sense of agency. It is common knowledge that the most powerful organizations, and even lesser ones, invest heavily in their location. The development of the Twenty-first Century city is a crucial project for the connectivity, sustainability and flexibility of the future organization (as well as a necessary subject for organization studies).

We will return to the concept of the city later in our paper – our immediate concern is fashion. What we will *not* be doing is importing mainstream 'fashion theory' into organization studies, or using fashion as a template to further research into organizations. However, our first term of reference is defamiliarization, as our first problem is method: how do we conceptualise fashion as a component in organization studies? The term defamiliarization we take from avant-garde artistic practice in the early Twentieth Century, and do so as a way out of prescriptive use

of theoretical templates. For we are interested in ‘defamiliarizing’ our concept of organization through ‘thinking fashion’, and discerning the ways in which fashion is internal to the socio-aesthetic economy of organizational life. We make no claim to fashion expertise (far from it!), but insofar as fashion’s historicity and theoretical self-definition draws on a range of familiar art historical, aesthetic and cultural discourses, we use it to provide a single yet reflexive context for understanding the relation between the body, identity, the representation and presentation of self, and how these pertain to both individual and organization itself.

Thinking Fashion

What *is* fashion? The term is deceptively complex. It involves a range of objects, processes of aesthetic mediation, regimes of dress and codes of display, artistic production, and modes of social representation or gender-ethnic-religious-cultural identity. Literary philosopher Roman Jakobson would understand the term ‘fashion’ as a *shifter* – it radically changes meaning depending on context and function, yet never losing a stable semantic content (Jakobson, 1960). For fashion is all of the above – individual, organizational, industry and deep market behaviour – and in our paper the term will shift from one to another, always disorientating and hopefully *defamiliarizing*.

Fashion can pertain to both the shifts in global industrial production of commodities, or our local ‘street styles’ or homemade apparel, bespoke or mass produced clothing for high street retail. Fashion involves extreme individualism, collective association and uniformity, social class-based taste and distinctions, national cultural sensibility with its institutions, manners, mores and customary routines and even historical iconography. The term fashion however, is more likely to evoke famous names like Coco Chanel or Yves-Sain Laurent, Couture houses like Dior, Givency or Gaultier, designers like Versace or Tommy Hilfiger; and high street boutiques like Gap or Diesel, or online design labels like Boden or street styles like Punk or Goth; and then, of course, there are the new ‘superbrands’ like Nike or Louise Vuitton. Fashion business may be in the accessory trade (like bags), rather than the garment trade.

Yet fashion is as much a force outside the realms of fashionable clothing and branded accessories. Many organizations aspire to the condition of ‘fashion’,

which does not mean they desire to be ‘fashionable’ (though some might be), for getting ‘in’ fashion entails a vulnerability to falling ‘out’ of fashion. It does equally not entail that organizations aspire to the condition of the ‘classic’ (i.e. enduring, not susceptible to trends, or worse, fads), if even the classic is defined by, and institutionalized through, fashion. Organizations aspire to the condition of fashion insofar as they desire the way fashion can move, change, respond and develop, according to shifts in market behavior or consumer desire, and in ways often imperceptible or unintelligible to market forecasters or economists. The ‘rationality’ of fashion – the ways it ‘thinks’ (if it were a subject) – involves both aesthetics and commerce (both design and consumer desire, or a design that seems to anticipate consumer desire with such accuracy); it combines *triviality* with profound symbolic significance; it mediates an almost instantaneous market mobility and viral-like self-generating appeal; it exudes romance even though it may be strategic business. And so on. The dynamism of fashion is like the very essence of creative entrepreneurial genius. The condition of fashion is surely the subject to which the ‘invisible hand’ of the market belongs – fashion is both subject and object, supply and demand, retailer and consumer. It is a mystery (Esposito, 2011).

Fashion is confidence and self-assurance (an arrogance that always seduces?). Fashion makes diversity coherent and is manifest aesthetically by certain trajectories of expression, movement, desire, judgment, attribution of value, intention and assertion in the market. For us as individuals, a significant influencing factor in the clothes we might choose to wear is the way they generate confidence. This confidence may perhaps only be negative (generated through ‘fitting in’ or in *not* ‘standing out’). Enhancements to our appearance makes an impact on our feeling a particular way. We might wear a suit to suggest formality or elegance. In certain regions a necktie for men is obligatory attire to accompany a certain type of clothing suitable for a certain type of space – whereas for others, in different regions, the tie is closer to optional extra in any space. For women, the place to where a dress or skirt is now seemingly much more flexible than in comparison to even a decade ago – we often hear of the term ‘a homogenised society’ – but is this so?

The relation between individual confidence and market confidence is the topic of another discussion, fashion – the individual, the group, the market – is nothing if

not confident self-assertion, mediated by a sensitivity to the mechanisms and regimes of representation and presentation along with their visual distinctions and concomitant socio-cultural meanings. 'Feeling' in organizations (as in decision making or business risk-taking) is an elusive subject, almost endless in its applicability. Feeling (like fashion itself) admits both whimsical personal proclivity ('I just feel like wearing this today, I don't care what anyone thinks') and profound self-identification with what is not self (the articulation of rank or authority or class allegiance). We routinely experience the seemingly un-reflexive, almost visceral, feeling of 'being comfortable' or the confidence that comes with 'looking good'. The visceral self-consciousness of the body is, of course, as visual mediated as it is heavily gendered. In many organizational regimes women have to tread the fine line between 'looking attractive' and not 'looking available'; they have to contribute to the beautification of the organization while also articulate its professionalism. They have perhaps to pander to the regard of their boss, as well as the prying eyes of the secretarial staff.

Defamiliarisation (or *ostranenie* in the original Russian) is a term that originated with the Russian formalist literary theorist, Victor Shklovsky, in an essay published in 1917 (Shklovsky, 1917/1990). Our use of the term is inevitably (desirably) mediated by a range of avant-garde influences, whereby a simulated cognitive dissonance or even mild conceptual disorientation can productively shunt the viewer (or reader) out of their normal habits of rationalisation and comprehension. The result is not, of course, total confusion, or at least not intentionally so – defamiliarization in all its variants aims for a fundamental reconstruction of one's relation (as subject) to the object of knowledge. This 'reconstruction', of whatever form its takes, will hopefully provide a certain self-reflexivity and consciousness of the conditions (or external, exogenous, determinants) of our perception. For we think 'we see what we see' and perception is a cognitive operation relatively uninhibited by non-cognitive phenomena, only to discover that the 'natural' operations even of perception itself are so fundamentally socially and culturally constructed, and in ways that distort and deform both our sense of self as much as our sense of intersubjective interrelations.

Defamiliarisation for Shklovsky, incidentally, was intended to both understand the

way art could show us the world, yet the world 'made strange' or different. It was used as a term in his rudimentary aesthetic theory by which we became alerted to the processes of transformation that art performed on everyday visual-empirical reality (against theories of art that assumed art revealed to us something entirely apart from the empirical world, whether transcendental, spiritual, or an act of pure imagination). For Shklovsky (who of course had many ideas on art one would not subscribe to today), art performed a 'relational' form of mediation, where the object of optical visibility (or linguistic intelligibility, like a poem) did not give you 'knowledge' *of it* (your usual cognitive mode of apprehension) but rather an experiential understanding of your relation *to it*. And that relation was as much *in potentia*, as actual and as emerging from specific conditions of aesthetic intelligibility (how much your sensibility was indeed capable of fully *relating to* the art before you).

Defamiliarisation is therefore a process that makes problematic our normal cognitive distinctions between the subject of perception and the object of knowledge. For the object offers an event of perception, and the subject eschews the possibility of knowledge in order to 'have' the object. For in the pragmatics of everyday empirical life, in making the world an object of knowledge we lose the world as a world of experience, a place for us: the world becomes material for task-driven appropriation. So defamiliarization makes problematic a distinction between subject and object, and so then between theory and method. In standard social science procedures of research, theory is the explanatory framework, and method is the application of research practice. However, as we all know, theory itself makes methodological assumptions (is indeed itself constructed a priori through methodological mediation) and methods are already enrolled in the prescriptive philosophical project of the theory. For us, defamiliarization offers something else. It does not invalidate standard research models (which have obviously been productive and have their own mechanisms of validation). Defamiliarization, first, demands we step outside well-rehearsed academic dialogue and debate, not assuming our subject is a problem already part 'solved'. Second, we approach our subject not unlike a phenomenologist, looking at the object of attention in terms of its qualities, the nature of its appearance, its demands on our perception, on our language. Third, we engage with the object in order to assess the extent to which it

shifts our modes of vision and strategies of inspection. We do not apprehend the object for the information or knowledge we can extract from it, but for the empowering experience of the encounter, and the way that engagement itself generates new provocations to thought and research.

So in this paper, we are not aiming so much for 'positive' knowledge, or concrete information on the relation between fashion and organizations. Having surveyed the research, there is no established discourse on fashion and organizations to draw on or dialogue with. Apart from longstanding anthropological and sociological attention to what Erving Goffman called the 'presentation of self in everyday life' (Goffman, 1959/1971) and the general functions of dress and clothing in society, Fashion Theory has developed as a recognized field. However, Fashion Theory tends to revolve around the products of fashion: it spans products and producers (clothes, designs, designers, styles, historical change) as well as their socio-market contexts (houses or design agencies, brands, media and the demands of the business) (for an overview, see Craik, 1994; Breward, 1998; Entwistle, 2000). For us, the spatial entity of the organization is a subject still awaiting attention from fashion theorists.

Dressing Up, Dressing Down

So we proceed with a view to defamiliarization, and begin with the product most common to Fashion Theory – *the dress*. The significance of the dress is primarily linguistic – all clothing involves 'dressing'. The dress as object is usually associated with women, but dress is both noun and verb. Dress is the means by which the human subject turns from the private domain of intimate proximity (its naked self) and faces the world. Dress is visually paradoxical, as the state of dress always implies undress as the form of dress always articulates the naked form that bears it. We all 'dress', are dressed up, over-dressed, dressed-down, and whatever our level of consciousness of our appearance is, we are always in a state of dress (is it appropriate? Does it articulate the necessary level of seriousness, concentration, respect, or professional intent? Am I comfortable?). Stepping aside from the traditional anthropological distinction between dress and fashion (where fashion is wholly Western in origin: Said, 1979: 3), the fact of 'dressing' is relevant to organizational study. For organizational life is a series of stages of having dressed, being dressed (and undressed !), where the human subject, the organization both

within (the underwear of spatial interiors!) and without (the 'power dressing' of architecture, or of brand image), is never wanting to be naked (what would that look like?), but always suitably 'dressed for the occasion' (remember the term 'power dressing'?). Even if organizations don't really want to 'be seen', they need to dress for the eventuality, for the moment of encounter, for those times in which representations of their appearance are crystallized (as in a press photo) and transported around the marketplace or globe.

The human agent is dressed for the organization; the organization is dressed for the city; the city is dressed for the market (although the synergies between cities and markets are profound, if under-researched with respect to the way organizations negotiate this relation). The market is, in effect, a giant wardrobe. Of course, it's not just a giant wardrobe. The 'wardrobe' here is a suitable metaphor for the way that the 'clothes' of the organization (like the clothes of the human agent) are never 'private' or emerge from a sewing machine or seamstress in a concealed closet somewhere, as if from a hidden private source of production. They are acquired from the market. The market is like a great wardrobe, displaying a range of possible options, that in turn 'models' meaning and style, generating the necessary haptic and optic data for designers, brands and manufacturers, who in turn replenish the market's powers of provision. Clothes may be designed by designers, but they are so within a range of socio-cultural and aesthetic criteria generated by the market, and the markets are the way they are in and through response to the city or the great metropolitan centres that are the manifest urbanization of the will of the market. Market and city are symbiotic, as the so-called global economy is formed (not wholly, but enough to maintain a condition of global influence) by the decisions made in and through the global network 'global cities'. And so organizations, whose powers of visual coordination are forged through the necessary linguistic and semiotic capabilities supplied for them, while it is the market that enables organization to properly and powerfully signify their identity, values, business propositions, financial intentions and organizational aspirations. For it is the city that is often the media of this activity, and the principle stage for any concerted communication.

The city is the reflexive medium through which the market production of organizational clothes are understood within the broad (often global) spectrum of

choices available. 'Being seen' in New York, Milan, or Abu Dhabi, is a perpetual perceptual substrate of an organization's self-consciousness of its actual physical operating in the global market. 'Being seen' – wherever it is – as Sartre, would say, is a condition of 'seeing' itself (Sartre, 1953). Seeing is dialectically bound up with being seen, and 'being seen' provokes a reflexive attention to how it is that oneself is being presented. There is no 'self' without the act of 'self-presentation'; there is no 'being seen' without a prior act of display. The 'display of self' (whether the agent, or the organization) is something we take to be routine and perfunctory almost (indeed, for many the very word 'fashion' signifies the ephemeral and transitory; it is pejorative), and yet history narrates otherwise. The history of clothing and the display of the body is complex and replete with significance, internal to the operations of historical power and meaning along with all the other social and cultural conditions of organization and organising.

Making the wrong choice on how our 'self-display' is arraigned or composed can mean turning up to the company's AGM in your beachware. The city sensitizes both human agent and organizations to the necessity of clothing, and significantly, that clothing is never not mediated by fashion, and over recent years organizational brand and design research has alerted us to this fact. So is talking about clothes and fashion just a gimmicky way of discussing what we already know? Not quite. You may have noticed how 'dress codes' as we call them have become less pronounced, more relaxed, more hybrid, and – in the post-global economic crisis era – more understated. Corporations are not 'dressed to impress' in the way they were in the 1990s. The era of brash individualism, of performative assertiveness and self-aggrandisement, is in decline. The corporate world is becoming a little less inclined to radical differentiation and a little more relational, cooperative, responsible, speaking the language of the good citizen. Global brands are less wanting to be the loudest mouth on the block, the brightest dress at the party, promising the world, acting like the Picasso of the art markets. The new 'global collegiality', is prioritizing 'relationships' and not image. It is morphing from the exhibitionism of bespoke costume, to a more nuanced 'ready to go' cut that inspires interaction and interlocution. Fashion is changing; organizational clothes are becoming more subtle.

This process of organizational 'dressing down', as we may call it, is not a 'going

grunge' or a decline in the importance of dress (not that dressing down is ever a devaluation of dress – as rock act Aerosmith's Steve Tyler stated at the MTV Awards in 2002, 'You have no idea how expensive it is to look this cheap'). It means that we need to develop more sensitive – social as well as cultural – means to understanding the complex aesthetic production organizational dressing. Dressing is an activity – in the world of increasing social media and hyper-complex digital mediascapes, organizations do not simply 'go out' and 'stay out all night' with one style of garb appropriate for that one party. They are constantly in a process of dressing and being dressed (or allowing others to dress, or undress, them), as they are not just 'being seen' at one party, but are having relationships all over the place; they are being 'addressed' and propositioned by a range of potential, ex- and current partners, in many different places. The world of brand and design theory finds the essential *temporality* of dressing difficult – as dressing is almost always understood in terms of the static image of the object of the dress as a 'design'. Dressing, however, makes the signification and aesthetic function of the designed object relative to space, discourse, and the trajectory of the subject: as Christian Dior famously said, 'It's not what you wear, it's how you wear it'. With organizational dress, there is no design ontology governing the spatio-temporal matrices of visual apprehension. Design is only ever embedded in the phenomenology of partial appearances – for no one act of self-presentation by dress at a single occasion will ever say what and who you are. The dressed organization, rather, needs to appear at successive occasions, and such occasions are concurrent and in several places at once. The organization may not want to 'be seen', simply be present. Perhaps it is being promiscuous, or has a secret lover. Perhaps it is waiting to be stripped, or is in the process of being stripped. But even to be stripped you need first to be dressed (preferably in a way that anticipates stripping).

Clothing perhaps represents our most important personal possession. Our choice of what to wear, how, when, and where, to wear particular choices of clothing suggests much about our identity (both at individual and collective levels) as it does the organizational environments through which we live and work. Yet for many, these choices are rarely examined, even though, paradoxically, most organizational environments inculcate a sensibility highly attuned to the

conventions of dress and dressing. We never simply 'just' put clothes on – as every item of clothing, even for our week-end out with the kids, has been carefully chosen (by us, or someone else), and belongs to a particular category and style of dress, and has a history (you got it for your 45th birthday), along with a function ('this is my deal-breaking suit'), expresses attitude ('I am successful enough not to care what I look like'). For your 'dress' resonates with a range of self-expressive gestures that make us who we are, how we work and how we live. Clothing is inseparable from our bodily mediation of our environment – which is one of the problems with have with the suppositions of organizational phenomenology. For 'the body' is never just the body – it is the 'clothing mediated body', *enclothed* in a dress of colour, shape, pattern, texture and material, which we must see as the immediate and reflexive addition for any situation described by phenomenology. My clothing mediated body is reflexive in that through the medium of my dress I have already anticipated and prepared for a situation that will always exceed my immediate expectation. Moreover, clothing is never merely 'positive' signification, or a 'statement' in visual form, but embodies a meaning deferred – as the act of dressing as an act of anticipation (what will happen, where I expect to go, or end up). Suitably, we can understand dress in terms of the history of costume (disguise, masquerade, theatre) and acts of fraud, as well as a social conformity to codes and uniform. The enclothed body is always a body that mediates the world though possibility as well as actuality (of both truths as well as untruths).

And through my prior act of dressing I have, by necessity (or even unconsciously, or mnemonically) projected myself through imagination into that situation-to-be, whereupon I am physically situated, generates a sense of temporality that is made dynamic by successive acts of expectation and anticipation, inflecting my self-conscious self-presentation with a consciousness of how *everyone else* appears. Along with the usual task-based physical engagement through perception of my world (as defined by mainstream phenomenology), I am made dissonant by the mobile and detached-attached experience of my bodily dress insofar as my body is never 'one' with my dress – for dress is always perceived primarily in a state of being worn (once we leave the mirror in the bedroom, we cannot see ourselves dressed), and in the changing state of 'being worn', our normally dormant senses of touch and smell and even hearing (the 'internal-external' hearing of our own

bodily movement) is activated. Our dress is perhaps not entirely fitting, or entirely how we want it to be, not hanging or flowing well, with uncomfortable friction between the particular layering we have chosen. Few of us have bodies that 'fit' the size and cut of any given manufactured clothing-range, (or, have personal tailors). Yet the act of wearing dress (not just having dressed, but the mode of 'carrying off' the sartorial intention or purpose of the dressing) is an expression of an intelligibility of some socio-cultural depth, however we trivialize it. For dress is a contiguous series of pulsating actions, of responding to and maintaining dialogue with the socio-aesthetic regimes of my organizational environment. Do I look right? Does my appearance allow me to mean what I say? The surface texture of a pair of shoes (scuffed; uncleaned perhaps) can in some contexts degrade in an instant a professional aura that has taken years to cultivate. Even worse, is the way those shoes, or that suit or skirt, *allows* you to walk. Do your accessories – watch, bag or briefcase, tie, handkerchief or scarf, hat or overcoat – clash or complain against your chosen apparel?

Acts of Display

There are times or moments in our life where our self-image is formed and consolidated most definitively, and these moments provide us with a store of reference that we use to visually comprehend our own personal appearance in any given moment. The slightly overweight balding businessman is often physically confident for the reason (at least in part) that whatever he looks like now, his 'self-image' was consolidated at a much earlier date. For when he looks in the mirror, he is not *merely* the 'slightly overweight balding businessman', but a 'sharp, forceful and physically assertive businessman', who at present, for reasons of circumstance, happens to be slightly overweight and balding. He was once something different. A snapshot of the present moment rarely provides us with the dominant reference with regard the formation of our *sense* of appearance, or perception of our own bodies. For what we wear is always 'in relation to' what we did wear or were wearing (at a time in which our professional stature was formed, perhaps); or what we saw others wear, or what we wore and 'carried ourselves' at the time in which our self-image found its most deliberate consolidation. For when a movie actress has finally become a star, she can finally relax her standards and regimes of style, and be photographed 'scruffy' at the shopping mall.

Reflexivity and relativity in clothing within organizational contexts is complex as it can be different for each individual over time. The 'way' you dress can articulate your own sense of existential duration within the spaces of the organization, or your age in relation to your peers or family, or whether your self-image is slowly morphing as a result of your children growing, or your organization growing, or the swirling spectrum of 'expectancies' that can change in the organization day by day. Gender, race, national origin, religion or class may at different times be driving forces in your reflexive experience of your own dressed appearance. Are you cross-dressing? Your organization may have a dress code – does it have a cross-dress code? Dress is subject to subversion, interpretation and re-negotiation on many levels, often in ways we never see.

The swirl of expectancies that can drive our sense and sensibility of dress must also be understood in the context of the market that the organization inhabits. This market, as we said at the start, has a 'synergistic' relation with 'the city' or the metropolitan urban environment through which markets are embodied and articulate their power to define global life (and the global business elites that govern global life). The city has its own procedures of dress, and these are often part of urban dress codes within which organizations dress themselves. The power of the city is that it is media platform for many markets, at many levels, both indigenous, regional and global, local and foreign – and the chaos and conflict that ensues is as much an authentic expression of the reality of market's ontology, as it is the smoother operations and physical composure of organizational architecture, HQs or the corporate office complex.

In the global economy, patterns of clothing and conventions of dressing are both changing and becoming universally intelligible. The nineteenth century colonial era was principally the era where dress became a global language, where British army officers could don the clothes of the native Indian aristocracy as part of the Raj regime. The Twentieth Century economy has witnessed the gradual detachment of dress from the symbolic order of ethnic, religious and national tradition, custom and the intransigent values of organic community. Dress was the immediate and necessary expression of (and response to) rank and class, or executive power. It embodied the necessary intensity, mode and character of deference and respect,

and so positioned one in the social order with an immediacy and certainty. Dress, historically, was a site for the onslaught of commodification, the individualization of social subjectivity and its necessary modes of self-presentation, as well as the triumph of market consumerism over all forms of social allegiance. The fashion of the catwalk is nothing if not the absolute expression of the emerging myth of pure self-determination or self-actualization, which in many parts of the world still remains unintelligible or bizarre.

In one sense, dress has become relative and the immediacy of its power of signification dissolved, or dispersed across a field of signifying contexts. The symbolic power of indigenous clothing no longer makes demands, command subservience or provoke hostility. Difference no longer establishes division or disagreement. Late capitalism and its making immaterial the substantive signifiers of social power, postmodernism and the 'waning of effect' of cultural value, quality and significance, has made all dress 'performative' to a large extent. If we arrange a business meeting with a Sikh businessman, and he arrives with sword (or *kirpan*) in hand, we do not experience nor interpret this as hostile or an impending conflict along with our immanent death. Quite the contrary: we relish it as a cultural encounter, manifest social diversity or demonstration of tribal heritage, or whatever. This encounter is a performative phenomenon, an aesthetic event, emptied of its substantive religious and ethnic content. For there is something more powerful than the conventions, codes and symbolic media of tribe, religion, nation or race, and that is the aesthetic power of fashion.

The concept of 'fashion' is not to be confused with 'style', for style is intrinsic to visual appearance and the compositional manifestation of design. Fashion concerns behavior and dynamics, of the interactive relation and trialectics of individuals, organizations and markets (Barthes, 1983/1967; McCracken, 1986; Laver, 1995). In one sense, fashion is the market's power to change deep cultural meaning, and do so in ways that inspire trust, allegiance and the adaptation of language and social behaviours accordingly.

That fashion embodies historicity in a most acute way, is obvious. Look at your family photos from 1972 – those haircuts, those sideburns, those lapels...and the colour of that necktie ! We can immediately situate a type of dress within around

five years of recent history. Yet it is also the case that the same jacket or style of trousers can appear in two different cultural epochs, and 'look' (signify meaning) in very different ways. The black leather jacket, the zoot suit, even pin-striped 'business' suit, have been used in different cultural epochs to very different effects, used by subjects in different segments of the social order. The dress code of the delinquent or teenage thug in 1955 (blue jeans and leather jacket) by the year 1980 became a mainstream fashion, and by 2000 could be used by businessmen with no damage to their identity or credibility. In the heady days of postmodernism, thinkers like Lyotard and Jameson were proclaiming that the new global economy had provided a new condition of hybridity for all forms of social representation, particularly clothing (Lyotard, 1979/1984; Jameson, 1991). It is some surprise then, that by 2012 clothing and the relationship between clothing and organizations has not and did not explode into a vast spectrum of eccentric and endlessly diverse choices for the organizational subject. For while individual consumer choice is feted as the fulcrum of the late capitalist economy, we could rather point to fashion in suggesting the opposite. Individual choice is heavily mediated, influenced and channeled into patterns of uniform behaviour. Individual consumer choice is symptomatic of the dynamics of the market insofar as what constitutes 'choice' (both as empirical and cognitive reality) is defined by the market through the value-system of fashion. We do not just choose, we choose what is on offer using the criteria of judgment and discrimination available, and doing so with as much (more) regard for the demands on my self-presentation from others and from organizations than to my own proclivities. The very concept and voluntarist experience of 'choosing' is one involving a spatio-temporal matrix of specific demands mediated by fashion – more accurately, mediated by the relation of market-city-organizations.

Fashion and Industry

Fashion is the complex and largely intangible discourse that nonetheless gains its identity as a discrete 'industry', and this industry is gatekeeper for the market entry of products, determining which styles and trends will prevail here and there and what kind of clothing is made and sold around the world. We make a mistake in thinking of this industry as hermetic and self-enclosed (as perhaps the bizarre creations of the Paris catwalk may suggest). The fashion industry is certainly

comprised of a hierarchy of professional sub-cultures, but the industry itself is animated by many features that offer an insight into fashion's broad economic relevance: for 'fashion' is the very movement and shape of socio-economic and cultural development for forms of life exposed to the global economy. In the fashion industry we can gain an insight into the cultural-political economy of 'the market' itself. The fashion industry stretches from the global circulation of raw materials, textiles and cloth, to shifts in market patterns of trade and sale, to social preferences and lifestyles, to brand and corporate values, to the creative 'fashion house' designs that are the media phenomena to which the term 'fashion' is indelibly attached.

Broadly, fashion is the cultural political economy of the market, where individual feelings of confidence and self-perception, consumer decision and preferences, are enacted in accordance with broad systems of the production of meaning and value; and where our dress (which is a reflexive and cognitive experience bound up with the aesthetic production of our organizations) is made possible and practical and affordable and necessary.

Fashion determines what forms of dress endure, become established or 'classic', obtain to a condition of flexibility or apparent 'neutrality', or look 'cool', 'the business', 'classy', 'self-assured' or 'going places'. The industry, specifically, plays what we might call an 'aesthetic management' role in this (Guillet de Monthoux, 2004). It is fashion, broadly speaking, that allows 'dress', specifically speaking, to be a system of signification that is as personally malleable as poetry and socially imposing as architecture. The fashion industry we could also say, after Foucault, is the police or regime control of urban style. To be sure, it relies on market networks of wholesaler-retailer partnerships and their cartel-like power, (their 'policing', in Foucault's terms), and who determine how even in the vast competitive field of the global market, control and constraints endure. For that \$2000 suit you purchased last week for that crucial business conference will not be retailing at ManSuits&Co on Monday and the following day worn by the junior sales team at Carphone Warehouse – whatever the falling currency markets, market trends in discounting and sales, or the contracting retail market will want. Price, cost, and profit are never wholly relative to the 'market forces' of exchange and consumer preference, however advocates of the free market would have us believe.

Organizational dress is subject to the complex socio-cultural and economic matrix that is fashion. And fashion is mediated and modulated by the retail spaces and socio-aesthetic dynamic that is the city – which is why, even in a global market of businessmen, business suits are different in New York than Paris than Seville or Sydney. The cloth, texture, stitching, proportion and order of sartorial value that in an instant signified your level of business acumen and past successes/failures. The sculptured, tailored, draped or layered structure of your clothing is not simply a personal statement, but the means through which your organizational participation is visually performed as well as signified. Fashion is as much about variation as homogeneity – in fact, fashion works because it creates commonality and a ‘sensus communis’ of interconnection without repetition and the devaluation that comes with ‘the common’.

In a recent special issue of EGOS’s journal – *Organization Studies* (32,5) – Barbara Czarniawska (guest editor) noted that fashion ‘...is a phenomenon that rarely receives neutral treatment. It has been treated with disdain and neglect in contemporary social theories, with the exception of theories in cultural studies, and that disdain has transferred to fashion in organization studies’. Yet (she continues) ‘...an understanding of fashion may be the key to comprehending many puzzling developments in and among organizations’ (Czarniawska, 2011: 599; also Czarniawska, 2008). Of course, as we stated above, the relation between dress and clothing, fashion and the organization are infinitely variable (that is, mediated through the socio-cultural terrain of the organizational modes of officespace, class, rank, task and function, personal self-image, and so on). Dress, moreover, is not the same as clothing, as clothing is empirical-aesthetic (it is physically designed attire), whereas ‘dress’ is both noun and verb, and in organizations it emerges as a performative enactment of the relation between the being and the doing: we dress, are dressed, are being dressed (or undressed), and our clothing (the appearance, value and meaning of our designed attire) is entirely relative to this temporal motion. It is this dynamic sense of ‘dress’ that fashion mostly pertains, as ‘being fashionable’ is in any case expressed by artifacts beyond clothing – to ‘accessories’ (your watch, her necklace), or even to your accompanying bag or briefcase or choices of beverage. In this train of thought, the concept of ‘costume’ is relevant; a cognate concept to ‘fashion’, the term costume evokes the

performative dimension of all clothing, a function accentuated, explored and caricatured in theatrical, carnival and festive costume wearing. Costume is a reminder that the act of dress is inherently concealing as well as revealing, and whose practice can gain access to the realm of fantasy, obsession, fetishism, scopophilia and natural voyeurism that are so natural to the repressed dimensions of the human psyche. The mechanisms of repression – social and economic rationalization, patriarchy and militarism – betray their schemes of control through the perpetuation of the ‘uniform’, the metaphoric use of ‘decoration’ (the medal, ‘stripes’) and an obsessive adherence to an ideal schematic rendering of the human skeletal structure. The cultural behaviours of the social subjects colonized by such deep phenomena are the ‘fashionista’, otherwise known as the ‘fashion victim’. The term, as popularly used, signifies someone enslaved to the perpetual flux of social trends and quickly responding to retailed style, often under social duress. However, the term betrays a deeper social meaning – the fashion victim is the epiphenomenon of the military psyche that generates uniformity in the very act of creating extreme differentiation.

Underpinning Czarniawska’s observations are several series of statistics amplifying the importance of fashion (and clothing). In 2010 the global turnover for fashion-related clothing was in excess of \$1781 billion dollars and as an industry it employed approximately 27 million people worldwide. At the same time, ‘fashion’ is not so easily contained within a certain segment of the global garment trade. Even those outside fashion – the un-fashionable – are often clothed with the remnants of past fashion regimes. The ‘antifashion’ of the likes of Steve Jobs or Mark Zuckerberg are still heavily mediated by fashion. The colour black, for example, routinely worn by Jobs, was by 1985 the antifashion choice that at once transcended yet inhabited the very essence of fashion. Black is distinctive and understated, creative and unpretentious, determined and unassertive. Even ‘non-descript’ geeks have their own fashion value (‘geek-chic’). The fashion industry has moved through the same economic stages or developmental periodisation as have other industries: from the market democratization of luxury in the 1960s and 70s, (with the consolidation of IP, trademarking and frantic corporate identity assertion), to the rise of the creative designer and exemplar-leader in the 1980s, to the massive vertical integration of products, retail and markets under brand

management in the 1990s, then the targeted brand management of international conglomerates up to the present.

Globally, the fashion industry is second only to Finance in terms of size. As an industry, it spans factories of garment production through to retail and media. It consists of at least four spheres of production – from the production of raw fibres and textiles, to patented or trademarked clothing designs, and their highly publicized pre-sale display in ‘fashion shows’ (or the lesser glamorous trade shows or cataloged product launches). There are the multiple ranges of fashion goods and accessories, by designers, manufacturers, contractors. There are the extensive spaces of retail, from individual boutiques to the large department stores of Bloomingdales and Selfridges. Lastly, the global fashion media – with historically famous magazines like *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Elle* and *Marie Claire* and a range of design, advertising, branding, internet, social media and now cable TV channels. The fashion media are not simply ‘mediators’ of a pre-formed set of products, but engage in highly complex feedback looping and consumer dialogue, setting and consolidating trends, forging tastes and values, making explicit and enduring associations between styles and class or celebrity, and creating the frameworks through which the fashion designers themselves explore, experience and relay the crucial and quite unique fashion ‘sensibility’, where great designers can almost smell the emerging zeitgeist of *contemporaneity*. With recent developments in the integration of *haute couture* into mainstream markets, the low market production of affordable luxury (Zara, Benetton), the proletarianisation of aristocratic chic (Burberry, Abercrombie & Fitch), the aristocratisation of sporting apparel (Lacoste, Pringle), the superstore retail centres, new factory ‘outlets’ and concession stores, make for a market force that demands that ‘ordinary’ garment production is now oriented around its standards as much as styles.

It is no surprise that the fashion industry is often quoted as the largest employer in the USA, or one of the fastest conduits of global cash. This is no surprise, given the global circulation of cheap cloth, materials light enough for compressed and cheap global transportation, methods of manufacturing simple enough to be mastered by children, and a product of endless variety that every single human being on the planet requires. However, Czarniawska’s comments are no doubt directed more towards issues that bring us back to our real subject – the

organizational significance of clothing and fashion. Central for her are issues around identity and the mediatory power of fashion on our everyday organizational existence.

Clothes, fashion and Organization studies

Our brief characterization of the fashion industry is empirically tangential, but theoretically important. For the industry exhibits in accentuated form many of the relevant dynamics of fashion as it convenes the broad market field within which organizations are situated. The degree to which fashion and clothing do play a role within organizational life is surely under-researched, as is the relation between organizations and the city. On the face of it, clothing (the basic empirical, symbolic or semiotic function of a person's visual appearance) has been involved in leadership studies (was it insignificant Steve Jobs wore black?), and also organizational identity, design and branding, the corporate environment, emotion and communication, aesthetics and artifacts, organizational behaviour and organizational culture; and, of course, the study of gender, power and critical management studies. If we were to list examples of research where clothing is relevant, they would be all too obvious. In the now established field of 'fashion theory' itself, we find studies on the politics of representation and the image of the body (Barnard, 1996), the bodily mediation of social milieu and cultural convention (Parkins, 2002), and the bodily 'techniques' of negotiating discursive regimes of power and knowledge through the construction of individual or group identity (Mauss, 1973; Craik, 1994). However, there is precious little on organizations per se, or even Organizational Aesthetics (OA). One part-relevant study is Bradley Quinn's (2003) *The Fashion of Architecture*. This unique research enterprise looks at the cross-disciplinary influences of fashion and architectural design, where the aesthetics of flexible, portable, interactive, and inflatable structures are being shared and developed in urban space. However it is largely looking at composition, design and production.

Our problematic is not just design or the language of visual signification, or even spatial aesthetics (Quinn, 2003). It is the dynamic of fashion as it animates the relation between clothes, organizations and the city. It is not for nothing that so many cities global cities are known as 'fashion cities' – London, Paris, New York, Milan, Tokyo – what David Gilbert calls 'world cities of fashion' (Beward and

Gilbert, 2006). At least, insofar as ‘the city’ is both physically and theoretically internal to the operation of fashion, and fashion requires the mediation of organizations to be able to make consistent and substantial its market trends and changing products as forms of social behaviour. Fashion is not simply culture, or an epiphenomenon of extreme surplus, or the icing on the cake of consumer leisure. In the era of virtual, electronic and global hypercapital, the role of the physical, tangible, materiality has arguably increased, and the fashion industry has penetrated even the economic under-class. Investment in the empirical-aesthetic urban location of the corporation has continued. Fashion guarantees hyper-visibility and a finger on the pulse of the most prescient developments in the global market.

The fashion industry itself demonstrates that the market continues to demand a physical and tangible realm of aesthetic experience, where the relation between the individual body and space retains continuity with its physical-material conditions of existence. For even though many corporations do not require a physical presence as part of their operations or production, they still invest in physical spaces and designed, branded, well-managed offices in ‘fashion cities’. Employees must still turn up at work, and at great expense to the corporation, spend much of their working lives inhabiting spaces that are never wholly justified in terms of the company’s gross productivity. And investment extends as much to the urban location of that space – the city in which the branded corporation is associated and from which it derives its workforce. The physical corporation space and the preeminence of the city as site of economic reproduction are still with us.

Which is why we link the terms clothing and cities, and one framework not mentioned above, in which we can approach the question of fashion and organizations, is by attending to the spaces within which fashion is a tangible dynamic. Fashion is not simply manifest in terms of discrete products (individual items of clothing), but in strategies of self-display that demand spaces for their realization. These spaces are not just containers within which fashion operates; the space is internal to fashions mechanisms of reproduction. The catwalk is not just a space – for clothing must be seen in motion, as a manifest articulation of the body’s temporality, always in task-driven enterprises that are nonetheless aesthetically driven by the complex substrate of individual self-awareness. As

mainstream fashion theory tells us, fashion is the relation between the body and social space – the social subject in successive acts of negotiating of spatially mediated sensibility, imagery, comportment, gestural signification demanded by specific regimes of social discipline. That's giving it a Foucauldian character, but it is something that can be empirically demonstrated. What we need to do is expand on this concept of 'space' as the realm in which clothes, fashion and the city can be thought as a research venture for organization studies.

In the last decade, attention to space in organization studies has increased. Space is more than empirical location, established through the measured control of individual workers, desks and tables, divisions and partitions, energy consumption, efficiency, production systems and work flow. Space is a site of socialization, inculcation of cultural behaviours and self-regulation (the discipline and surveillance of the workforce); space is site of corporate management strategy (the control and distribution of resources; the regulation of production); space is a media of communication and expression (the expression of corporate identity, brand, values, symbolic commands and affirmations); space, even within a corporation, is an expanse replete with social dynamics and part of the process of social reproduction (Baldry, 1999; Gieryn, 2002); labour processes have a profoundly spatial dimension (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998), and the workers, employees or managers within corporate spaces do not just operate 'in' space, but as labouring subjectivities co-create and are created by their spaces of operation (Dale & Burrell, 2003, 2008; Witz, Warhurst and Nickson, 2003). And, of course, the organization itself is a labouring agent, whose flair, aspiration and desire for interpersonal interlocution is articulated through architecture and new office design (Hancock and Spicer, 2011).

Why 'space' is an attractive framework of study in our context is because that it is both theoretical and empirical, relevant to physical structures and systems of labour as well as individual people going about their daily business – it is therefore broad enough to encompass the active collision of clothed subjects, organizations and the city. For the 'interior' spaces of organizations within the economic organization of the contemporary metropolis is coextensive with the 'exterior' space of that city. Its employees inhabit both; the processes of social communication (including dress) and language that are cultivated within that city complex are also

necessarily active within the particular zones of organizational space. As we have said, 'the city' in this paper can only be identified in principle and not substance: there is a vast and growing literature on the interconnections between culture, economy and polity in the urbanization process of city development, and contemporary urbanism is increasingly relevant to the study of organisation in this context (Jacobs, 1960; Sassen, 1991; Konvitz, 1994; Zukin, 1995; Florida, 2002; Rantisi, 2004; Cooke and Lazzeretti, 2008).

The *spatial* in organizations can admit the intangible, non-measurable, excessive sphere of organizational life where subject and object are not clearly delineated. Space involves the relations between form and content and thus that which is not fully identifiable and controlled by the regimes of strategic, operations or production management. However, being as much concerns with subjects as objects, it dissolves the disciplinary division of labour between the study of management and the study of organization. The spaces of organization moreover are social and cultural, subjective as well as objectives, and not simply economic or defined by and through the ideologies of paid labour, business professionalism and 'official' corporate practice. With a spatial analysis we can draw together the disciplinary specialisms of strategy, leadership, behaviour, operations, design, and so on, in understanding the organization's self-assertion as subject in the global market society and as actor in the locational expanse of the city.

For (i) the organization, market, city are all overlapping spaces that nonetheless merge into one synthesised space (the city is in the organization is in the market is in the city and so on), and all three are highly urbanized (even the internet is 'urbanized'), and for research they are at once formed by distinctive and measurable conditions, yet whose dynamic relation is always changing; (ii) the agents of change – whether people, artifacts, value-regimes or social ideologies – appear and function differently depending on their spatial mediation (like the same design styles, which can evoke different aesthetic responses depending on their spatial context – clothing, internet, organizational interiors, architecture, and so on); (iii) all organizational phenomena – from behaviour and regulation, management strategy, communication, identity, brand, values, symbolic language – are all subject to fashion, and yet fashion as a concept has been so flaccid as to not be analytically useful. As a spatial phenomena, however, fashion can be more

specifically defined as the dynamics of dressing, *where the clothed subject negotiates the cultural political economy of organizational urbanization*. The term 'organizational urbanization' refers to the way interior and exterior organizational spaces are co-creative, and how the dynamics of organizational life are heavily inflected by the synergy of city and market. In other words, it is a means by which 'organizational aesthetics' extends its field of interests beyond the artifactual and environmental and into regions considered by organization studies in its broadest sense.

In the research literature on the city and urban economy, we find many streams of thought relevant to the study of organization. We can identify four relevant categories of urban study: (i) the creative economy or new urban economy (Hutton, 2010; Cooke and Lazzeretti, 2008) – it is significant that the most significant global centres of economy and commerce are world fashion centres, and centres of the so-called 'creative economy'. How organizations are mediated by the urban spaces they inhabit, the creative milieu and urban cultural economy that they find so appealing, is an open question. (ii) Following from this is the question of media and communications, given that cities are now media hubs, and centres of connectivity, 'mediacities' (Krätke and Taylor, 2004; Eckardt, et al., 2008) in a new 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). The experience economy thesis demonstrates the collapse of the separation of organizations from the regions of leisure and culture that allowed them to generate hermetic environments. (iii) Subjects – people, creative workers, the 'creative class' (Florida, 2002; 2005) or new mobile 'cultural creatives' (Ray and Anderson, 2000) or educated 'bourgeois bohemians' (Brooks, 2000): of course, organisation studies has been deeply involved in investigating the 'new model worker' (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998; Hancock and Spicer, 2011). At the same time, the new model workers of the new urban economy of flexible, specialized labour, are themselves participating in cultural shifts in fashion, which they experience and perpetuate on many levels.

Conclusion

If we may conclude with a series of suggestions for further research, using space as a way of defining organizational fashion (where the laboring subject, along with the organisation itself, is always in a state of being 'dressed' and hosting a process

of dressing whose dynamics and meanings resonate on the one hand with the broader market and on the other urban cosmopolitanisation of the city). The shape or form of this dressing is determined by fashion – which pertains as much to maverick entrepreneurialism and individual clothing as much as corporate brand and collective uniformity.

How is the dressed body – not merely clothed, but dressed in and through the regimes of organizational life – at once empowered in dress and aesthetically immobile and passive by the fashion-averse regimes of organizational dress-codes (written, spoken, unspoken)? Where, in specific modes of organizational dress, does the linguistic and the visual meet in articulating professional behaviours that are derivative of the city and urban cultures of metropolitan globalization?

How can the often concealed forces of fashion that animate the relation between organization, city, market and dressed agency of the employee, be defined as both mode and source of organizational knowledge? How is fashion the means through which market and city are *manifest* in the spaces the organization blindly assumes are its own?

How is the organization formed and deformed by the urban regimen of the city? How is it dressed for the city: over-dressed, under-dressed, or cross-dressing for the global markets?

How can a fashion sensibility -- an acute awareness of image, symbol and synecdoche; the powers of visual discrimination, taste, comportment, manner and style – feed into the creative dynamism of organizational life? How can the organization become ‘fashion-conscious’ and thus so understand the spatial operations of market and metropolitan urbanization in the organization? How can the organization inculcate the sensitized awareness and personal commitment to responsive development that is exhibited by the ‘fashion-conscious’, and how can this make organizational change in the face of rapid global economic re-scaling the source of evolutionary energy and not the ‘struggling to keep pace’.

How, therefore, can the organization allow a greater opportunity for self-actualisation in the realm of individuated identity, the unfolding of richly textured

subjectivities, organizational sub-cultures, nouveau movements in style and individuation, as the way in which it inhabits the 'experience economy'?

How is the agency of the dressed body made over into an artifact by being subject to forms of rationalization enacted upon its environment or its branded interiors (i.e. how is the organizational subject reified through dress or dress the vehicle of reification of active agency)?

Where organizational space will always be animated (dominated) by the will-to-power of strategic management regimes and organizational control, allowing the development of fashion-consciousness could create a productive tension between sensual expressive and responsive subjectivity and collective uniformity. This tension could be productive in the sense of maintaining a realm of reflexivity in organizational life, where shifts in market and in urban life are always present in articulated form. The 'presence' of fashion reduces the tendency to conformity and ideological sclerosis, where the fixity of boundaries and defense to established norms always prevents innovation in a fast moving global economy. Indeed, how are the moral imperatives that embody organizational uniformity in dress part of a spectrum of inhibiting behaviours that in turn are repressive of an organization's response-facility to, and vitality in, the market.

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